



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 2 June 2020

by Robert Hitchcock BSc DipCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10 June 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C4235/W/20/3245336

Thorn Grove, Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle SK8 7LB

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by EE (UK) Ltd and H3G (UK) Ltd against the decision of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref DC/074746, dated 18 September 2019, was refused by notice dated 12 November 2019.
 - The development proposed is the installation of a replacement 20m monopole, accommodating 12 no. antenna in an open headframe together with the upgrade of the equipment cabinets and ancillary development thereto.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
 - the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the locality; and,
 - if any harm is caused, whether it is outweighed by the need to site the installation in the location proposed.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is made up of two areas of land lying at the back of the pavement on the northern side of Thorn Grove. The level areas are adjacent to a mesh wire fence bordering public open space beyond. Thorn Grove is within a suburban area of predominantly two storey residential development and community facilities set about small estate roads and including established green spaces and landscaping. On the opposite side of the road lies additional open space incorporating playing pitches and a grassed area close to a bend in the road.
4. The westernmost part of the site incorporates an existing monopole just short of 12 metres in height, according to the appellant's evidence. Various associated ground-based equipment cabinets are located close to its base. These are a short distance to the west of a gateway into the public open space and are intended for removal on completion of the proposed works.
5. The proposal includes the erection of a stout monopole with an open framed headset incorporating 4G and 5G antennae. These would achieve a combined height of about 20m. In addition, the plans show a row of equipment cabinets

set either side of the mast close to the fence line and on the opposite side of the gateway within the second area of the appeal site.

6. Although the proposal would be sited distant from residential properties to ensure that it would not dominate views from within nearby dwellings, the open nature of the land either side of this section of Thorn Grove exposes the proposed location to wider views. I observed that the absence of development of any significant height and the distance from established tree belts in the locality would result in a wide area of unobstructed views of the mast.
7. Whilst acknowledging the attempt to minimise the scale of the headframe, the height of the mast and relatively large diameter of its upper section would contrast sharply with the scale and slenderness of the existing street furniture along this part of the road. At about 20m in height, the mast would significantly tower above other development and existing trees in the locality. In this context the relatively large size of the headframe, taken with the exposed antennae design, would draw the eye such to accentuate the scale of the proposal.
8. Seen in views over a relatively large distance, the mast would be at odds with the modest residential scale of the locality and introduce a utilitarian design that would appear harsh in the context of the existing residential development and greenspaces.
9. Furthermore, notwithstanding that some ground-based equipment cabinets may be erected under Permitted Development Right provisions¹ (GDPO), the necessity for the number of units in association with the proposed mast would serve to highlight the scale of the apparatus at the edge of the public highway. The length of consecutive cabinets would appear stark against the open fence and the siting would benefit from little screening or ability to provide it. Although the positioning of the cabinets would retain sufficient width of pavement to facilitate continued unimpeded use by pedestrians and other users, the combination of their number, various sizes and forms would create a visual clutter at the base of the mast. In combination with the scale and form of the mast and absence of landscaping, the proposal would appear prominent and incongruous in the locality.
10. Although the development would replace an existing facility, the difference in the height and size of the proposal would, to my mind, give rise to a disproportionate scale of development that would cause a severe adverse impact on the character and appearance of the locality. This effect would be exacerbated by the absence of proposed landscaping or use of existing opportunities in the vicinity to seek to screen parts of the development and minimise the effect of its visual impact.
11. For the above reasons, I conclude that the scale and design of the development would cause harm to the character and appearance of the locality and conflict with Policies SIE-1 and SIE-5 of the Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2011) (CS) as they seek to protect the character and appearance of locations.

¹ Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(England) Order 2015 as amended by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2016

Other considerations

12. Paragraph 112 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) sets out the objectives for communications infrastructure. It states that: 'Advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections. Policies should set out how high-quality digital infrastructure, providing access to services from a range of providers, is expected to be delivered and upgraded over time; and should prioritise full fibre connections to existing and new developments (as these connections will, in almost all cases, provide the optimum solution).' In addition, the appellant has drawn my attention to several Government statements and documents highlighting digital communications as a key Government priority.
13. The proposal would provide social and economic benefits by introducing 5G coverage into an area where there is currently none. This would increase data transfer speeds and capacities in the locality. Furthermore, this is proposed in a way where two operators would utilise a shared facility to minimise the number of electronic communications masts necessary to provide coverage. These are matters that weigh in favour of the development.
14. The appellant has advised that the proposal would replace the existing mast and cabinets, however, as a new development Paragraph 113 of the Framework requires that it should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate. Whilst the appellants refer to an assessment of alternative sites within the operators' defined search area in this regard, there is little detailed evidence before me. It is therefore unclear whether sites that might provide improved opportunities to assimilate the apparatus remain available.
15. Although it must be accepted that structures of significant height cannot be entirely hidden, the appellants' proposal for colour finishing to assimilate the development in the context of the site would not, to my mind, achieve a level of camouflaging or integration that minimises the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the locality.
16. Furthermore, I am also mindful of the appellant's argument that the GPDO accepts the principle of 20m high masts and supporting equipment cabinets under the 'Prior Approval' process. However, that process also remains subject to appropriate consideration of siting and appearance.
17. The appellant has directed me to a number of appeal decisions² for similar developments which were allowed. However, there is limited information regarding the details of each case and I am therefore unable to draw direct comparisons or conclusions. Accordingly, I have considered the proposal on its own merits.
18. I accept that the proposed development would be compliant with the guidelines published by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection. However, this is a neutral factor in my determination.

² APP/W0734/A/11/2154882, APP/K2610/W/17/3176890 and APP/G5180/W/19/3231491

19. The lack of objections from third parties or statutory consultees does not constitute a benefit in favour of the development.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

20. For the reasons set out above, the mast would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the area. In this regard it would conflict with Policies SIE-1 and SIE-5 of the CS which seek to secure high quality places and minimise the visual impact of telecommunications development respectively, consistent with the objectives of the Framework.
21. Although I am mindful of the benefits that would arise from the proposed telecommunications infrastructure, in the absence of clear evidence demonstrating that the site provides the best available option for minimising the effect of the development, I conclude that the locational needs of the operators does not outweigh the harm that I have identified to the character and appearance of the area.
22. For the above reasons, the appeal should be dismissed.

R Hitchcock

INSPECTOR